

News from Ed Markey

United States Congress

Massachusetts Seventh District

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CONTACT: Michal Freedhoff

or Mark Bayer

(202) 225-2836

DIRTY BOMB MATERIALS UNACCOUNTED FOR **Markey demands answers regarding disappearance of radioactive materials**

Washington, DC: Congressman Edward J. Markey (D-MA), a senior Member of the House Energy and Commerce Committee and Select Committee on Homeland Security, today sent a letter to Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC) Chairman Nils Diaz regarding information indicating that numerous highly radioactive sources of cesium, which could be used to make a dirty bomb, are unwanted or cannot be accounted for by their current owners. According to an April 4, 2003 memo sent to the Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC)¹, 11 of the 134 "Gammator" sources are currently unwanted by their current owners and 8 could not be accounted for.

"Al Qaeda is reportedly seeking radioactive materials with which to construct a dirty bomb or homemade nuclear weapon in North America, and the most recent elevation of the terror threat level to "Orange" was in part motivated by fears of a terrorist plot to detonate a dirty bomb in an American city," said Rep. Markey. "The NRC simply is not doing enough to ensure that these materials are secured by their owners."

Cesium-137 is a highly radioactive isotope that appears in powdered or pellet form, making it highly portable and very dangerous. In 1987, scavengers in Brazil opened an abandoned canister containing 1400 Curies of powdered cesium and circulated its contents among the community, which resulted in 244 people contaminated, 54 people hospitalized, 19 people with radiation-induced skin burns, and 4 people dead.

According to the copy of the memo obtained by Rep. Markey, 120 of Gammator devices were distributed to schools, hospitals and other institutions under the "Atoms for Peace" program. In 2003, a survey was performed in which owners of the cesium Gammator sources, each of which reportedly contains between several hundred and several thousand Curies, were asked whether they still had the device and if they were still using them. Alarming, 11 sources are unwanted by their current owners (2 in IL, 1 in NC, 1 in NJ, 1 in NY, 1 in OR, 1 in PA, 3 in TX, 1 in WI) and 8 sources could not be accounted for (2 in MD, 1 in NJ, 1 in NV, and 4 in NY).

Rep. Markey's letter demanded information regarding:

- Whether the cesium sources that could not be accounted for have been located, and what the NRC has done to locate these and other missing radioactive sources.
- Whether the NRC has issued additional Security Advisories and/or Orders to owners of these and other types of radioactive materials.

¹ This memo will not be released publicly because it contains sensitive information concerning the specific locations of these dangerous materials.